



Timely Torah Insights

Mishpatim

Training to Take the Positive Path

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*This issue is dedicated by Rabbi and Mrs. Baruch and Rivka Bodenheim
L'iluy Nishmas his grandmother, Toyba bas Binyamin Menachem a"h (Yahrzeit, 25th of Shevat)*

Your alarm rings in the morning. It's dark out and you feel exhausted. Then the conversation with yourself begins. "I'm so tired, I need a couple more minutes. No, I'll be late. But...I won't be able to function today. Let me just hit the "snooze" button once. Better late and better rested, right?" Rav Dessler¹ says this is an analogy to the "I" and "You" struggle. The "I" is the body which craves immediate satisfaction and comfort, while the "You" is the soul, which wants a connection with Hashem and therefore wants what is best for us.

In Parshas Mishpatim, we learn a life-changing attitude about doing what must be done...even when we don't want to. The Parsha is replete with mitzvos that train us to be responsible and sensitive to others. One specific mitzvah in the Torah is to prevent unnecessary pain to animals. When one sees a donkey buckling under its load, one must go and help lighten the load.² Besides the benefit to one's friend to prevent the collapse of his animal, we must be considerate to the *donkey* to help alleviate its excess burden. This is known as *tza'ar ba'alei chaim*.

Still, a person is permitted to use animals for his needs, even though it might cause discomfort to the animal.³ Therefore, it's permitted to use animals for labor, ride on an animal as transportation and to eat kosher animals.

There are cases, however, when a higher priority shifts the course of action. Let's say you encounter two people at the same time -- your friend, whose animal is buckling and needs help to unload his animal, and your enemy who needs help loading his animal. The Gemara⁴ tells us one must help his enemy load. Although unloading will help alleviate the suffering of the animal, in addition to helping one's own friend, helping one's *enemy* takes precedence because it's more important to train ourselves to seek peace *and* to do things we aren't inclined to do.

Rav Aharon Kotler⁵ says the Torah is teaching us that self-discipline to achieve positive character conditioning is so important to human beings that it overrides the pain the animal is [temporarily] experiencing. This conditioning is crucial to a person's success in overcoming many daily challenges. We are confronted daily with opportunities to do good and sometimes we might have urges to do things we are not allowed to do. If we are honest and self-aware, we'll see a pattern in our decisions. Too many times, the "I" (choosing to satisfy our urges) has the upper hand. If we feel insulted, "I" wants to respond with an insult. Or if we worked hard or feel stressed, "I" wants to put responsibilities aside to have a good time. The "You" voice inside us, telling us to take care of immediate responsibilities first, is easy to ignore.

The best strategy when trying to get someone to take care of a responsibility he doesn't want to deal with (a 'You' situation), is to motivate him by describing the task as something that will give him pleasure (an 'I' situation). But if all our positive actions are motivated by being convinced they are actually pleasurable, then we don't stand a chance of overcoming life's challenges when we are just not in the mood or do not feel the necessity to perform the needed action.

The sefer Avos d'Rabbi Nosson says, "Performing a single task that is *difficult* is worth more than one hundred easy tasks."⁶ Ignoring the gratifying "I" choice of personal enjoyment, even if just occasionally, helps condition us for success when we are faced with challenges. There are many chances each day when we can make choices, and each occurrence is an opportunity. For example, there are benefits to wearing a suit and tie each day. Whenever I have a simcha to attend, I am already dressed for the occasion! For my wife and daughters, it's much more of an effort to attend a *vort* or wedding because they have to change into appropriate clothing. I'm dressed up and ready to go! So I remind them, "It's easier for me, but you get *much more* reward for going because it takes much greater effort to change clothing to look appropriate for the occasion."

Next time someone asks us for a favor, and it's difficult to find the will to do it, remember to seize that special opportunity to be a positive "You." Taking those extra steps, listening to that positive voice, awakens your soul to grab the moment. Taking that less traveled and more challenging path...is your road to the *real* You, the manifestation of your soul, which is connected to Hashem.

¹ Michtav M'Eliyahu Vol. 1 pg. 143

² Mishpatim 23:5

³ Minchas Chinuch: Mitzvah 80

⁴ Bava Metzia 32b

⁵ Mishnas Rav Aharon Mishpatim 23:5

⁶ Avos d'Rabbi Nosson 3:6

Halacha in the Parsha – Parshas Mishpatim Changing the Truth for the Sake of Peace *by Rabbi Berel Steinerman*

The Torah (Shemos 23:7) tells us מִדְּבַר־שֶׁקֶר תִּרְחֹק, “Keep far from a false charge.” We are instructed to distance ourselves from falsehoods. The trait of אמת, truth, is very important. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 64a) writes that the seal of Hashem is truth. The Mishnah (Avos 1:18) writes that the world is supported by three things: Justice, Truth and Peace. Conversely, the Gemara (Shabbos 119b) tells us that Yerushalayim was only destroyed once there were no more truthful people there. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 92a) even compares falsehood to idol worship.

However, there are some circumstances where one is allowed to depart from the truth. The Gemara (Yevamos 65b) writes that one can say something untrue for the sake of peace. It cites the story of Yosef and his brothers. After Yaakov’s passing, the brothers told Yosef that Yaakov had requested that he pardon them for selling him. These instructions were never given, nevertheless the brothers were allowed to fabricate them in order to preserve the peace between themselves and Yosef. The Gemara also brings the story of Sarah and Avraham. When Sarah was informed that she would give birth when she was 99 years old and Avraham was 100, she doubted how her husband could father a child at such an old age. When Hashem informed Avraham of Sarah’s remarks, He changed her wording in order to protect their marital harmony.

In Sefer Chofetz Chaim (Rechilus 1:8) the Chofetz Chaim writes that if one is asked what someone said about them, they should avoid answering as much as possible. If this is impossible, one is allowed to lie for the sake of peace. Similarly, he writes (Lashon Hara 10:17) that it is pious for one to accept blame for others actions to prevent one’s friend from embarrassment.

There is a similar Gemara (Kesubos 17a) regarding saying untrue things for the sake of peace. Beis Shammai ruled that one should praise a bride at her wedding as she is, without any exaggerations. Beis Hillel says that one should call her a כלה נאה וחסידה, a fair and attractive bride. Beis Shammai asked Beis Hillel, how can you praise a bride who is a cripple, isn’t that a prohibition of מִדְּבַר־שֶׁקֶר תִּרְחֹק? Beis Hillel responded that if someone bought an item from the market that you know is of poor quality, and he had no way to return it, wouldn’t it be the right thing to praise his purchase? So too we can praise a bride, even though she has obvious flaws. The Gemara concludes that we see from here the importance of being empathetic to others.

Beis Hillel’s opinion needs some further explanation. Even though the bride may be insulted by the words of the guests if they were strictly truthful, how does that outweigh the prohibition against lying? The Ritva explains that Beis Hillel’s opinion is based on the concept that anything said for the sake of peace is not considered a forbidden lie. Likewise, the Yereim (Mitzvah 235) writes that it is only forbidden to lie if it causes harm to others. He actually asks based on this on the opinion of Beis Shammai, how could he invoke מִדְּבַר־שֶׁקֶר תִּרְחֹק as a reason to prohibit such praise if there is no potential damage? He answers that since this could potentially trick the groom, Beis Shammai holds that it should be avoided.

However, there is another way to explain the opinion of Beis Hillel. The Beis Shmuel (Evan Ha’ezer 65:2) writes that we can explain the praise of “a fair and attractive bride” as referring to her actions. We aren’t telling a total lie since there is a way to interpret the words truthfully. This is also implied in Maseches Kallah Rabbasi (10) that quotes Beis Hillel as explaining his opinion this way. We find a similar concept by Yaakov, where he tricked his father Yitzchak into giving him the brachos. As Yaakov was bringing Yitzchak his food he said (Bereishis 27:19), וְאָנֹכִי עֹשֶׂה בְּכֶרֶךְ, “I am Esav your firstborn.” Rashi explains that if you pause after the first word you have two separate statements; “I am (the one bringing you food)” and “Esav is your firstborn.” Since it was possible to interpret his statement some way as factual, it was not a violation of מִדְּבַר־שֶׁקֶר תִּרְחֹק.

The Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 156:2) quotes the Sefer Chasidim that limits the license of saying untruths for the sake of peace. He writes that this is limited to something which already happened and not to something that affects the future. Therefore, if someone asks for a loan and you are concerned that they won’t pay you back, you cannot claim that you don’t have anything, since the lie will be about something in the future, not something in the past. The Shulchan Aruch Harav (ibid:2) asks about this limitation, since we know how great the mitzvah of creating peace is, perhaps it should apply even to things in the future? The Mishnah Berurah (ibid:4) similarly says that the Magen Avraham needs further clarification, and seems to reject this limitation. As with any Halachic question, one should always clarify with a competent Posek how to behave in their own life.

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